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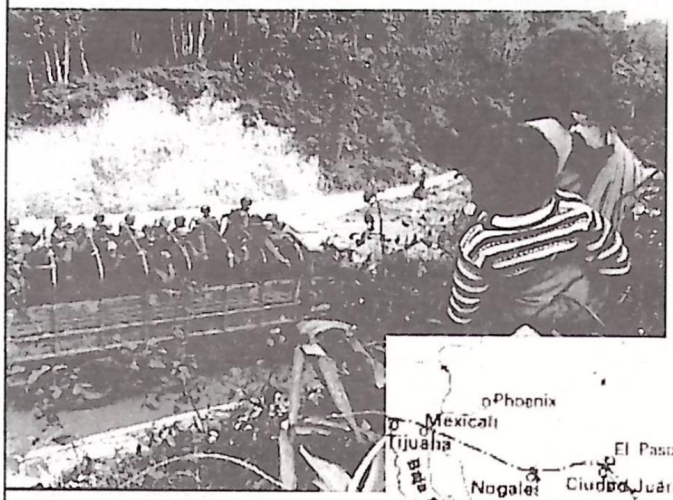
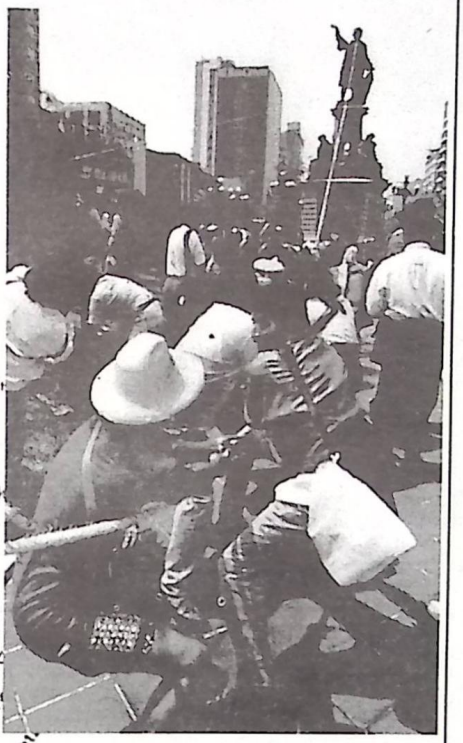
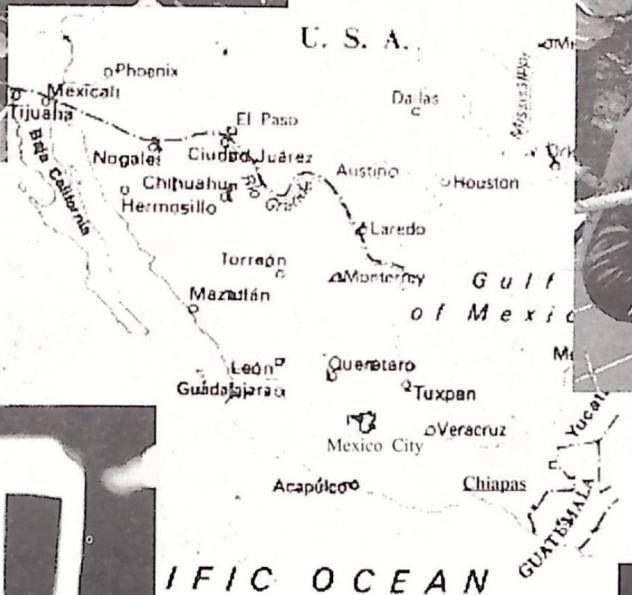
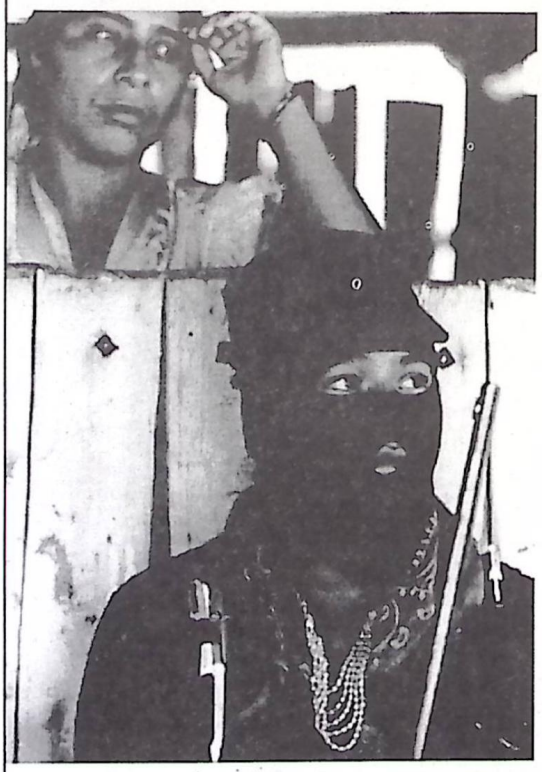
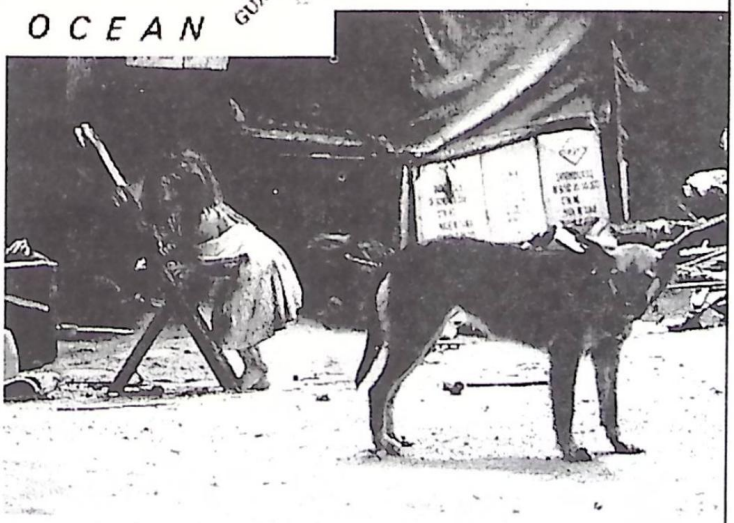
Mexico
Information Pack



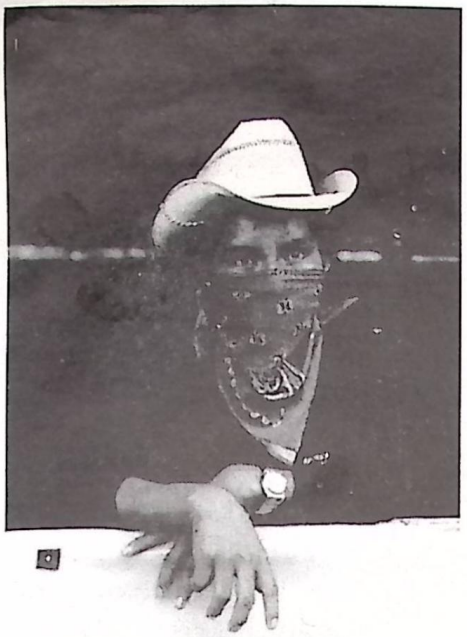


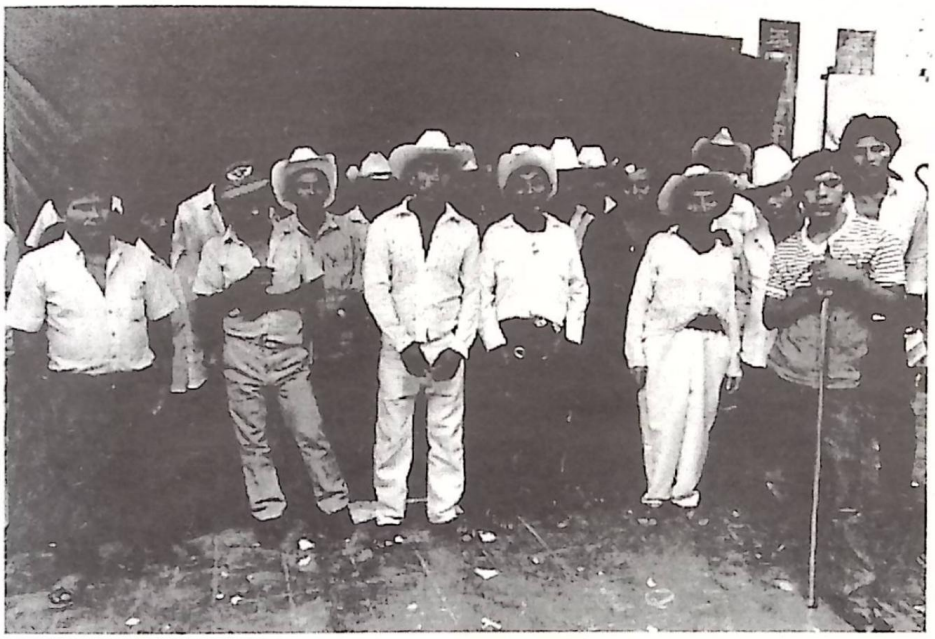






Irish Mexico Group





Irish Mexico Group, 10 Up. Camden st. D2

"We like the Irish around here"

Subcomandante Marcos

The Irish in Mexico have an honourable history. If our earliest rumoured appearance was the arrival of St. Brendan the Navigator for a short visit in the fifth century of the current calendar, our most celebrated - and less doubted - intervention was that of the San Patricio Battalion, some 200 Irishmen who crossed to the Mexican side in 1848 during the war with the US. It's impossible to be sure what inspired their defection but it seems that reminders of a shared faith, offers of land, and large amounts of tequila all played their part! Kindly, the Mexicans today insist the Irish became convinced of the justice of the Mexican cause.

Today Irish involvement in Mexico takes many forms. Although not a major trading partner, Mexico is a profitable venture for Ireland: we export far more than we import (in 1994 £61.5m worth of food, drink and other goods - the bulk being chemicals - being exported to Mexico, and only £8m imported). Irish products are not always appreciated, however: Greenpeace and other environmental organisations claim that milk powder sold to Mexico by Bord Bainne after the Chernobyl nuclear power station disaster was dangerously radioactive. Irish-based multinational Smurfit also operates in Mexico. As wages are lower there than many countries in South East Asia, and labour rights severely restricted (strikes must be declared 'legal' by the government - the majority are not), economic and social instability may not stop firms from 'relocating' or expanding to Mexico.

Pledge of resistence

It is likely the Mexican governemtn will unleash a fresh wave of repression against those of its people who dare to say "Enough" in the near future. In order to deter any repression and to be able to respond rapidly if it happens we are collecting as many resistence pledges as possable. To take part in this fill out this form and post it to the address at the bottom left of this page.

Name:
Address:

Phone No:

In the event of future attacks I pledge to (please tick)

Ring the Mexican embassy to protest ☐
Take part in pickets and demonstrations ☐
Donate £20 to help organise publicity & demos ☐

Irish Mexico Connections

State to State

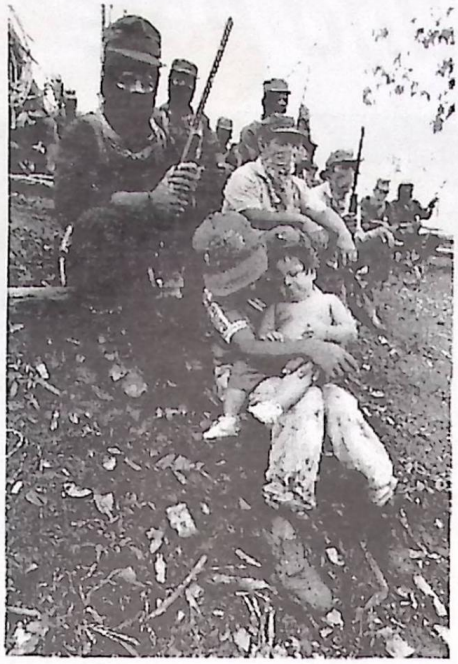
Mexico recently opened an Embassy in Dublin, now at number 43 Ailesbury Road, Dublin 4. They are, naturally enough, on the phone (01.2600699), and they have a fax line as well (01.2600411). Ireland, in contrast, does not have an Ambassador in Mexico. Instead we have an Honourary Consul, Romulo O'Farrill Jr.. Señor O'Farrill belongs to one of Mexico's most powerful families (part of the so-called 'oligarchy') which owns various newspapers and used to have a large stake in a major TV company. His address is Avda. San Jerónimo No. 790A, Col. San Jerónimo Lidice, Deleg. Contreras, 10200 Mexico

(Tel. 00.52.5.5953333,
Fax 00.52.5.6835500).

People to People

Ireland is also home to the Irish Mexico Group/ Meitheal Mheicsiceo na h-Éireann. Set up in the summer of 1995 in response to growing public interest in and sympathy with the EZLN struggle for democracy and justice in Chiapas, the group tries to keep people in Ireland informed about events in Mexico and to support the peoples of Mexico trying to live in peace and dignity. As well as holding public meetings, we sent a delegation to investigate the situation in Mexico, focusing in particular on human rights abuses in the state of Chiapas. If you would like to know more about what is happening and/or would like to get involved with the group, you can contact us at the address below. Membership is £5 a year if you are earning, otherwise £3. We try to answer all queries, but are dependant on donations to cover the postage.

The Irish Mexico Group/ Meitheal Mheicsiceo na h-Éireann, 10 Upper Camden Street, Dublin 2. Fax 01.4783738



Opposition Groups

Beyond the parliamentary spectrum, there are many opposition groups: peasant organisations, a national debtors' movement (El Barzón), industrial workers' groups, womens' organisations and, in several states, small guerrilla groups. The EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation), which launched a rebellion on New Year's Day 1994 in the state of Chiapas, caught the attention of the world with their anti-authoritain style and demands for justice for all. As in other parts of Latin America, liberation theology (radical christian social criticism, including elements of Marxism) has spread in the Catholic Church, to which some 85 percent of Mexicans belong. Evangelical protestant churches have also established themselves among the poor in Mexico.

Like the rest of the world, Mexico is not immune from political pressure from the United States. This comes not only in the form of economic sticks and carrots. The US sells arms to the Mexican government, trains army officers and - through Drug Enforcement Agency Programmes - provides helicopter gunships and other military equipment used against the Mexican people. One common refrain laments ¡Pobre México, tan lejos de Dios, y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos! (Poor Mexico, so far from God and so near to the United States!).

Some of the Names of the 90 s

Carlos Salinas de Gotari: President 1988 to 1994. PRI member. Now (Dec. 1995) on the run, wanted for questioning on corruption and drugs issues.

Raúl Salinas, Carlos' brother: a director of various public companies for many years, now in jail in Mexico on charges of corruption and involvement in the murder of leading PRI figure Ruiz Massieu.

Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León: elected President 21.8.94, took office 1.12.94. PRI member. Minister for Planning and Budgets 1988-1992.

Manuel Comacho Solís: senior PRI man passed over for presidency, later led negotiations with the EZLN for the government.

Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas: PRD candidate generally recognised as having won the 1988 presidential election but denied office by massive fraud.

Samuel Ruiz: Bishop of Chiapas, known for radical social views. Mediated between Government and EZLN.

Carlos Castillo Peraza: President of the PAN

Porfirio Muñoz Ledo: President of the PRD

Amado Avedaño: Governor-in-rebellion of Chiapas. Avendaño, editor of an independent, critical newspaper in Chiapas, was denied the post of Governor, which the usual election procedures ensured went to PRI candidate Robledo (later replaced).

el sup

el sup is Macros, he is nothing...he is tired of the drudge of working at the check out in Dunnes Stores, of wrapping double whoppers in Burger King, of trying to please a manager who looks at you but sees only quotas. el sup is full of hatred, for the cops who stop you on your way home in the early hours of the morning, for rent week, for the bills that tie you to the job that milks you of all desire except to switch on the television when you get home, for the fact that it's five more days till dole day, for your own pathetic efforts to better yourself through an education that teaches you nothing and offers you nothing but a better choice from the shelves of boredom in the career supermarket. el sup is still in gaol while murderers walk free. el sup is a Palestinian in Israel,...a pacifist in Bosnia, a housewife alone on a Saturday night in any neighbourhood of any city, a traveller who can't get served in a pub or find a half way decent site with water or facilities. el sup can't love who he wants. el sup can't live with who she likes because of a decision she made when she was too young to know any better. el sup is consuming pints or books or records or clothes in the hope of finding an answer. el sup stays alone or sleeps around or goes out with mates and is still alone. el sup walks into a bar and meets all stares and no smiles. el sup is getting up in the morning to face the fireworks. el sup is coming down. el sup is tired, tired of sitting, asking what is to be done. el sup is me and you. el sup is the Mexican indians who have no land in their own land. el sup is everyone who says "ENOUGH".

BE A ZAPATISTA WHEREVER YOU ARE

Irish Mexico Group, 10 Up. Camden st. D2

`Ya basta!

A brief history of the E.Z.L.N.

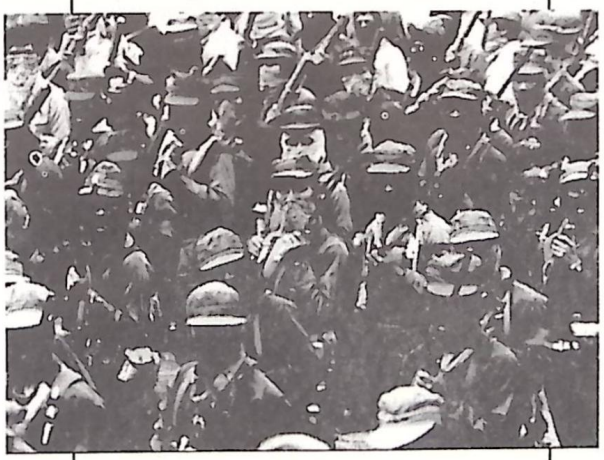
Declaring enough was enough (¡Ya basta!), the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) took four towns in Chiapas in the early hours of New Year's Day 1994, taking the world by storm.

Although the Federal Army had clashed with a small armed group in the Lacandona Forest the previous summer, the Mexican government, at that point trying to convince the U.S. Congress of its internal stability in order to get the North American Free Trade Agreement passed, had denied the existence of a guerrilla movement in Chiapas. Now, on the very day the NAFTA came into force, a small force of men and women "wearing scruffy wellies and armed with peashooters" had declared war on the government. In the poorest state a group of indigenous people were claiming the right to defend themselves against a government and a social order which offered them nothing and wanted their land.

The rebels caught the imagination of the world. They quickly withdrew from the towns they had taken, making a stand only in Ocosingo, where they had to fight their way out of a Federal Army trap . The behaviour of the official forces contrasted with the Zapatistas' apparent disinterest in killing, but national and international protests forced the government to agree a truce on the 12th of January (1994). Samuel Ruiz, the Catholic bishop of San Cristóbal, Chiapas, offered to mediate. He described the rebels as follows:

"The Zapatistas do not want to represent all the people of Mexico, but rather to make an appeal to the whole nation from the perspective of the marginalized indigenous people — so that all sectors of Mexican society can participate in building a better country ... after all this is over, the Zapatistas do not want to become a political party or a movement. Rather, they want those in power to open the system to the participation of all. They want power to no longer be based on domination, but on service and participation."

The rebels, it turned out, had been organising in the jungle for ten years. The supreme command rests not with a general or a Chairman, but with the Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee (CCRI), a large body made up of delegates from all the Zapatista communities. The delegates are in turn bound to reflect the wishes of the village assemblies, open forums where everything from land use to war on the government is declared. The EZLN are the first grass roots controlled army of the 20th century - perhaps of any century? In addition, 35% of the Zapatista Army are women, who are treated as complete equals by their male comrades - as required by the Women's Revolutionary Law.



The poetic communiqués of the EZLN, usually issued by enigmatic spokesman Subcommandante Insurgente Marcos, and the empowering sight of the Zapatistas, who always appear masked either by balaclavas or bandanas, taking on the powers that be with the power of the imagination and guns that had been begged, borrowed or stolen, brought the world's press and television reporters to Chiapas. But in February 1995 the government, under pressure to crush the rising before it spread (Chase Manhattan Bank sent them a memo 'advising' that future investment would depend on the "elimination" of the Zapatista challenge), rushed forty thousand troops into Chiapas.

After another storm of protest, including demonstrations of over 100,000 in the capital and protests to Mexican embassies throughout the world, the offensive was halted. But although the peace process has resumed, and even made some progress, at least on paper, the troops remain. Often camped right beside a village, they and the police carry on a 'low-intensity' war against the peasants who dared to challenge the government. International human rights monitors from groups as respected as AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL and Human Rights Watch have documented many cases of unlawful detention, torture, rape and murder. The systematic abuse of human rights, prevalent throughout the country, is compounded by the massive army presence.

In the face of this provocation, the EZLN have continued resolute in their search for justice, rebuilding what has been destroyed and looking for new ways to tackle the old oppression. On New Year's Day 1996, two years after they hit the headlines, they announced the birth of the Zapatista Front for National Liberation (FZLN), a movement open to all not affiliated to a political party, seeking to write a new constitution for a new nation. Although the EZLN do not intend to give up their guns, the new FZLN is to be an unarmed organisation, based on but not controlled by the EZLN. And its aims go further than reform of Mexican society. The Zapatistas have issued an invitation to the world to join them in the Lacandona Forest for a World Meeting of people struggling against neoliberal economic and social politics (Thatcherism and Reaganomics for the 90s). It could be the start of something big ...

Irish Mexico Group, 10 Up. Camden st, D2

`viva Zapata!

Emiliano Zapata was born in the village of San Miguel Anencuilco in the state of Morelos on the 8th of August 1879.

The son of a 'strong farmer', Zapata grew up to become the most famous leader of the Mexican Revolution. Like Connolly or the Ladies' Land League in Ireland, Zapata is paid much lip service by the Mexican establishment, but his revolutionary ideas are ignored by those who inherited the power won in the Revolution. A gifted organiser, Zapata also spoke Náhuatl, his local indigenous language.

Elected leader of his village in 1909, Zapata began recruiting an insurgent army even before the Revolution beginning in 1910 which overthrew the dictator Porfirio Díaz. The links between the dictatorship and the U.S.A., combined with Mexico's colonial past, gave rise to much 'revolutionary nationalism' - revolution as defence of the nation - which is still a vibrant force today.

Zapata: As an icon and as a person

Zapata's Liberation Army of the South did not accept the new reformist government under Francisco Madera. The Zapatistas fought on against government troops lead by Victoriano Huerta, the general who overthrew Madera in February, 1913, and was then deposed in 1914. At the following Convention in Aguascalientes, called to decide the future of Mexico, the Zapatistas demanded 'tierra y libertad' - land and freedom - for their people.

This was the core of Zapata's 'Plan de Ayala', produced in November 1911. Clearly influenced by anarchist ideas spread in Mexico by people like Ricardo Flores Magón, Zapata demands the socialisation of land:

"The lands, forests and water that have been usurped ... will be immediately restored to the villages or citizens who have title to them ... Because the great majority of Mexicans own nothing more than the land they walk on ... one third of these properties will be expropriated ... so that the villages and citizens of Mexico may obtain *ejidos* , sites for towns, and fields"

Zapata remained in opposition, fighting against terrible repression, until 1919. Lured to a meeting with government troops apparently mutinying against President Carranza, he was gunned down on April the 10th, 1919. Although the insurgents fought on, and Zapata's ghost was seen to ride the hills of his native state, Morelos, the conservatives won out, and Zapata's ideas of fair distribution of land remained ignored until the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas in the late 1930's.

Zapata's memory, like his ghost, rides on in Mexico. His name has been invoked by the indigenous rebel army in Chiapas, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), in their struggle against exactly the same social ills that Zapata fought against: large landlords and (often foreign-owned) big business running a corrupt and repressive régime that leaves the peasants, particularly indigenous peoples, landless and exploited. Throughout this century, people all over the world have risen up against oppression, taking heart from Zapata's cry:

"It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees!"

Irish Mexico Group, 10 Up. Camden st, D2

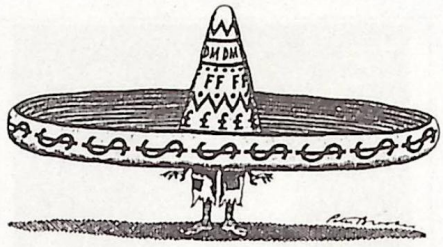
MEXICO:
The truth of the economy

"The government has tried to portray Mexico as a First World country...But behind this picture is the real Mexico, the Mexico of the millions of Indians who live in extreme poverty. We have helped peel of the mask to reveal the real Mexico."
(Subcomandante Marcos)

On 1 January 1994 Mexico entered the First World. They entered N.A.F.T.A. with a flurry of excitement from both American and Mexican big business. Within a year the grand illusion of the 'Mexican Miracle' had been laid to rest and the economy fell to its knees as close to $11 billion was taken out of the economy by investors. Clinton stepped in with a $40 million aid deal to save the Mexican economy and his face at home. Mexico's foreign debt increased and controls and burdens shackled the economy.

Mexico is a land divided into the extremely rich and the extremely poor. The economy run by large business and corrupt officials has consistently ignored and spat on a massive proportion of the population. Rural areas are worst hit. The indigenous people were without a voice for decades.

This 'First World economy', when studied, shows a lot of contradictions. 41% of the population have no running water; 34% are without electricity; 63% of the people live in accomodation of only one room; 19% of the workforce has no possible income, and 67% live on or below the minimum wage. The National Consumers Attorneys Office threw light on these statistics when a study they released showed that twenty of the most essential products that make up the basket of goods consumed by families in Mexico cost the equivalent of between 7 and 10 minimum wages. A litre of cooking oil and a kilo of rice costs roughly one day's pay. The economy for years has benefitted big business, foreign and national, and the divide between rich and poor is widening every day. Since 1988 the difference between the rich and the poor has become very severe. Fifty million people live in poverty, while twenty four billionaires top Forbes list of the wealthiest people in the world.



Neo-Liberal economic reform in the past decade in Mexico has to a large extent worsened conditions for the country's poor. The need for Mexico to preserve its market credibility for investors is driving towards what economist John Eatwell calls "a low growth, high unemployment equilibrium". This provides huge profits for a few and misery and increased poverty for the majority of the population. In the past ten years the number of people living in extreme poverty in rural areas has increased by almost a third. Mexico's recent peso devaluation cut wages to an average of 34 cents per hour. The Mexican Secretary of Commerce hailed this fall as "an inducement to foreign investment", aiding the privileged minority. The N.A.F.T.A. agreement will push people off **their** land and increase the unemployed labourforce, adding to problems in rural areas. Reforms have achieved nothing, but add to the debt the economy owes to private and foreign investors. The people of Mexico say "ENOUGH".

In order to keep up with the demands of its labour force Mexico needs to create 19.2 million jobs. However N.A.F.T.A. turns a blind eye to the country's workers. The New York Times, the greatest ally of American Foreign Policy, predicts that "several million Mexicans will lose their jobs in the first five years after the accord takes effect". Far from becoming the model for economic reform, the Mexican economy is plunging into a cesspool of economic debt, poverty, ruin of the manufacturing industry and death and impoverishment of millions. Since January 1995 foreign investment has declined by $2.5 billion a month (Banco de Mexico)

Analysis of the Mexican economy proves that far from being the bastion of economic reform, it is fragile and weak without foreign aid and investment. The majority of people gain nothing from a system that panders to the New World Order. For every day that the system continues children starve, families grow poorer and workers' grievances rise. Change must come. We support the indigenous people and all the downtrodden of Mexico. Viva la Revolucion!

Irish Mexico Group, 10 Up. Camden st. D2

Institutionalised Revolution ?
Mexican politics in the 20th Century

The political history of Mexico after the Revolution is dominated by the evolution of what novelist Vargas Llosa called "the perfect dictatorship" - control of all areas of public life by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (the Institutional Revolutionary Party). Founded in 1929 as the Party of National Revolution, it has governed without interruption for nearly 70 years.

Few women and indigenous people rise to senior positions. This reflects discrimination typical of Mexican society. As well as gender-based prejudice, Mexican society still discriminates between mestizos ('mixed race' people with European and indigenous ancestors) and indígenas (the original Americans). The latter are regarded by many mestizos as racially inferior.

The massive party apparatus and the nationalisation of certain industries and of land may appear similar to the situation in the Soviet Union, but private ownership of property never disappeared in Mexico. The land reforms (in particular in the 1930s under Pres. Cárdenas), which returned much land to the peasants working it - in the form of ejidos (collectives) - did not break the power of local landlords (caciques). Recent 'reform' of the Constitution has allowed for further privatisation of land. The fortunes of trade unions have varied under different presidents, but a double policy of restrictive labour law and selective inclusion of labour organisations in the political establishment has been constant.

Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León: Current president

The United Mexican States, as Mexico is officially called, is a federal republic consisting of 31 states and the Federal District of Mexico City. Executive power is in the hands of the President, who is elected every six years by adult citizens, and the Cabinet s/he appoints. The National Congress (parliament) consists of a Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.

Carlos Salinas de Gotari: President 1988 - 1994

The 500 deputies of the Chamber are elected for 3 year term; the 128 Senators for a 6 year term. Each state has its own constitution, and is administered by a governor elected for 6 years and Chamber of Deputies.

Elections are, however, anything but free and fair. The power of local PRI officials in all aspects of economic activity ensures a certain degree of support from voters 'repaying debts'. Fraud is also widespread. In 1988, the government's presidential candidate looked set to lose to opposition candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (PRD) ... until the computers 'broke down' in the middle of the count. International human rights groups such as Amnesty International have documented many cases of intimidation of voters and opposition activists.

Violence as a political tool ...

Political assassinations are frequent, torture and detention without trial commonplace. Difficult opposition at home, such as the students in 1968, has been - literally - murdered. The use of violence as a political tool also occurs within the ruling elite: the murder of PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio in 1994 is generally attributed to others in the tension-ridden party.

Despite this political climate, there are two main opposition parties: the centre-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), which is at present in decline, and the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN - National Action Party, based in the richer North), which is gaining ground. While both oppose the government, they do so from different perspectives, and it is the local activists of the PRD who are more likely to be targeted by the army, police or private para-military groups.

VITAL STATISTICS

Area 1,958,201 sq. km.

Population 90,000,000 (1994), some 70% living in urban areas.

Languages Official language Spanish; many other languages spoken

Armed Forces c. 175 000. Has been substantially modernised recently.

Religion approx 85% Roman Catholic.

Independence from Spain was won in 1821.

Member of the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the OECD

Part of the North American Free Trade Agreement trading zone.

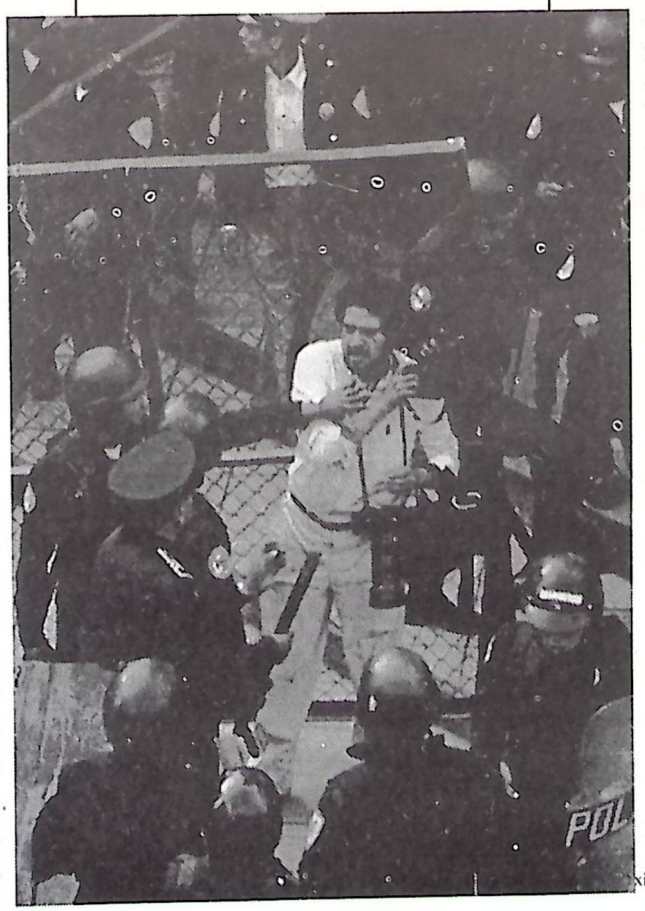
Irish Mexico Group, 10 Up. Camden st, D2

HUMAN RIGHTS IN MEXICO

In December 1995 an Irish fact-finding delegation to Chiapas was surrounded by a collection of gun-toting officials and local hard-men, who demanded papers and invited the group to accompany them to an office to help with their inquiries.

The delegation challenged their authority and after a few tense moments of pushing and shoving and wobbly camera footage the officials backed off and the group continued on its way. Frayed nerves apart, no one was hurt and the incident amounted to no more than a minor act of intimidation. But it left the delegation with a powerful first-hand insight into the nature of the Mexican security forces, particularly the unofficial and unauthorised nature of many of its operations.

The Mexican government is keen to present Mexico, since 1993 a member of the OECD, as a dynamic progressive society, a suitable location for international investment. An essential requirement for membership of the Liberal Democracy Club - whatever about social justice - is a reasonably independent legal system. Recent years have seen a number of reforms of the Mexican legal system. In 1994 for example, a member of the opposition PAN (neoliberalist) was appointed head of the Attorney General's Office by the newly installed President Zedillo. The Zedillo presidency has also provided Judges with the power in certain circumstances to review the constitutionality of laws and established a Consejo de la Judicatura (Judicial Council) to oversee the appointment of district and circuit court judges. A significant earlier reform was the setting-up of the National Commission of Human Rights (CNDH). This body performs the role of ombudsman on human rights issues, but with no power to enforce its recommendations. After the massacre of seventeen campesinos in Guerrero in June by police, the CNDH moved quickly to produce a detailed report and did not shrink from blaming the security forces. The CNDH, having been ineffective in earlier cases, gained considerable prestige as a result of its performance on the Guerrero killings. According to Amnesty International, it has been instrumental in increasing human rights awareness in Mexico. Yet despite these important reforms, human rights in Mexico continue to be violated on an alarming scale, giving the lie to the PR presentations of the Harvard trained government spin-doctors. Amnesty, though it praises the CNDH, goes on to suggest that such bodies may well be a contributory factor, rather than the result of, the ineffectiveness of the legal system. The reality on the ground is of security forces who continuously disregard the fundamental principles of justice to which Mexico, as party to international human rights agreements, is supposed to subscribe. Arrests without warrant, illegal detention and torture are everyday features of the Mexican legal system in practice. Summary execution is also part of the security forces repertoire, although this dirty work is more usually performed by paramilitaries with links to the security forces and the PRI. The increase in paramilitary activity, in response to the growing assertiveness of Mexican people emboldened by the EZLN uprising, is perhaps the most worrying aspect of the Mexican situation. Like the attempts to establish a fair and free electoral process, Mexican legal reforms, while superficially impressive, are hopelessly inadequate on closer examination



xico Group. 10 Up. Camden st. D2

Cearta daonna

Mí na Nollaig seo caite, i Chiapas, Meicsiceo, rinne buíon fheidhmeannach, gunnaí ina nglaic acu agus bodairí na háite ina dteannta, toscaireacht as Éirinn a thimpeallú.

D'ordaigh siad dosna hÉireannaigh a gcuid pasanna a thaispeáint agus thug cuireadh dóibh teacht leo chuig oifig éigin chun cabhrú lena bhfiosrúchaín. Mar a tharla, bhí sé de mhisneach ag na hÉireannaigh dúshlán na feidmeannach seo a thabhairt agus tar éis cúpla nóiméad de ruaille buaille, físcheamara neamhshocair an ghrúpa ag taifeadadh faoi bhrú, thráigh an teannas agus tugadh cead a chinn don ghrúpa gaelach. Níorbh ann a tharla ach mioneachtra agus tháinig gach éinne slán aisti, ach chuaigh sí i gcion go mór ar na hÉireannaigh mar léargas pearsannta ar mhodh oibre na forsaí slandála thall.

Tá rialtas Mheicsiceo ag iarraidh cruthú gur tír faoi bhlath í Meicsiceo an lae inniu, go bhfuil dul chun cinn soisialta is eacnamaíochta curtha í gcrích acu agus gur áit feiliúnach í anois le haghaidh mhóir infheisteoirí an domhain mhóir. Is amhlaidh go bhfuil an rialtas ag súil go n-amharcfaí uirthi mar chuid den Chéad Domhain, seachas den Triú, gur ball de Chumann an Rachmais Daonlathaigh í anois. Ach le bheith ina bhall den chumann seo tá córas dlí go measartha neamhspleách ag teastáil, cibé scéal faoi ceartas soisialta. Le blianta beaga anuas, ní féidir a shéanadh ach go bhfuil roinnt leasuithe dlí curtha i bhfeidhm ag rialtas Mheicsiceo. Tar éis don uachtarán Zedillo teacht i réim 1994, mar shampla, ceapadh duine ó pháirtí an fhreasúra, PAN (nualiobrálach) mar cheannasaí ar oifig an ard-aighne. Agus a bhuíochas sin arís ar Zedillo, tá sé anois de chumhacht ag ag an gCúirt Uachtarach athbhreithniú bunreachtúil ar reachtaíocht, agus tá Coiste ann (Consejo de la Judicatura) le breithiúna na cúirte cuarda agus na cúirde dúiche a cheapadh.

Leasú tábhachtach i 1990 ab ea bunú an Choimisiun Naisiúnta, um Chearta Daonna (CNDH), eagras a bhfuil cúram an Ombudsman air i dtaobh cearta daonna ach nach bhfuil de chumhacht aige a gcuid moltaí a chur i bhfeidhm. Ní raibh sé de mhianach ag an CNDH ar dtus dul i ngleic leis an Rialtas chun cearta daonna a chaomhnú. An meitheamh seo caite, áfach, tar éis do phóilíní i nGuerrero seachtar campesinos déag a fheallmharú d'fhisoraigh an CNDH an scéal gan mhoill agus d'fhoisligh sé tuarascáil a d'fhóghair go neamhbhalbh gurbh iad forsaí an stáit ba chiontach. Thuill neamhspleachas agus diongbháilteacht an CNDH sa chás seo cáil de shaghas eigin don eagras agus, dar le AMNESTY tá an CNDH ag cabhrú go mór chun eolas a scaipeadh faoi chearta daonna.

Ach d'ainneoin na leasuithe thuasluaite, tá cearta daonna i Meicsiceo á sarú i gconaí ar leibhéal atá ag teacht salach le plámás léannta lucht fógraíochta an rialtas. Cé go bhfuil an CNDH molta aige, feictear d'AMNESTY go bhfuil an baol ann go méadaíonn leithéidí an CNDH míeifeacht an chórais dlí in ionad í a laghdú. Is í lomfhírinne an scéil ná go bhfuil na forsaí slándála beag beann ar chothrom na féinne nó ar bhunphrionsabail an cheartais a bhfuil dualgas ar Mheicsiceo cloí leo de réir conarthaí idirnáisiúnta um chearta daonna. Chuile lá, déantar daoine a ghabháil gan bharántais, a choinneaíl go mhídhleathach agus a chiapadh. Anuas ar sin, go tráthrialta feallmharáitear "amhrasáin" ar an toirt, ach fágtar an drochchúram seo de ghnáth faoi na paramíleataigh, a bhfuil baint acu leis na forsaí slándála is an PRI. An ábhar buartha is mó i Meicsiceo faoi láthair ná an méadú ar gníomhaíocht na bparamíleatach céanna. Is cosúil gur iarracht é seo cosmhuintir na tíre a chur faoi chois, a bhfuil a gcuid cearta á n-éileamh acu agus ar thug éirí amach na Zapatistas spreagadh is ardú chroí dóibh. Ach an oiread leis na leasuithe togchánaiochta, ainneoinn go bhfuil cuma suntasach ar leasuithe dlí i Meicsiceo, ní leor iad - ná baol air.

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WOMEN - THE STRUGGLE WITHIN THE STRUGGLE

"The still water in the vessel overflows and turns itself into a wild river of movement ...."

"The women are the spiritual and material support of this army; if we can survive in large numbers, it is thanks to them ...." (Subcommandante Marcos)

When EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) began to organise some years ago, the women understood that they too could and should fight with all their people against the exploitation, discrimination and abuse of power they are victims of because of the fact that they are indigenous. But at the same time they understood that because of the simple fact that they are women, they had another front to fight on. They had to put an end to the discrimination they suffer within their own society, a traditional and extremely macho society in which they are considered inferior beings with no right to a place in public life or to education. After long debates between all the groups of the different communities, the women spoke out through their spokeswoman Ramona, a member of the Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee (CCRI), to demand that their rights be recognised. Thus, on the eighth of March, 1983, the Womens' Law of the EZLN was passed.

The ten points of the law are:

1. Women, regardless of their race, creed, colour or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in ways determined by their desires and ability.

2. Women have the right to work and receive a fair salary.

3. Women have the right to decide the number of children they will bear and care for.

4. Women have the right to participate in the affairs of the community and to hold positions of authority if they are freely and democratically elected.

5. Women and their children have the right to primary attention in matters of health and nutrition.

6. Women have the right to education.

7. Women have the right to choose their partner and are not to be forced into marriage.

8. Women shall not be beaten or physically abused, neither by family nor by strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished.

9. Women will be able to hold positions of leadership in the organisation and military rank in the revolutionary armed forces.

10. Women will have all the rights and duties laid down in the revolutionary laws and rules.

The acceptance of this law has permitted the women to join their people in the struggle against the oppressor.

Some decided to join the armed struggle. They are the insurgents, a generation of very young women that the people have sent to war. They joined the EZLN and make up 35% of it. The majority hold some rank. They are in positions of responsibility, organised and possess a great capacity for the struggle, because as they explain themselves: "We have nothing to lose because before we did not exist". They were born into rural indigenous communities in Chiapas but they have never lead a normal life, do not live in houses or have children, nor any project for the future other than to put an end to the injustice that has been killing them for many centuries. The Zapatista Army has given them something: they have learnt to read and write, learned about politics, combat tactics and the use of arms. But the most important thing is that they are respected by their male comrades and share the same rights and duties as them: a great cultural leap compared to their mothers, which is the reason it is the latter who urge them to join the EZLN.

Two of the 1000's of women who fought with Zapata.

The others, those who cannot join the army because they have children to look after, fight from their communities. They are members of the CCRI and their work is organisational and ideological. They are busy organising womens' groups so that little by little they teach each other what they learn: mainly Spanish (to be able to defend themselves against the oppressor) and politics (so that they all understand better what they are fighting for and against). They are also busy providing food, clothes etc..

But the struggle is the same for all of them: a struggle to get their rights as women respected by their own people and that the right of this people to live a dignified life in their own land.

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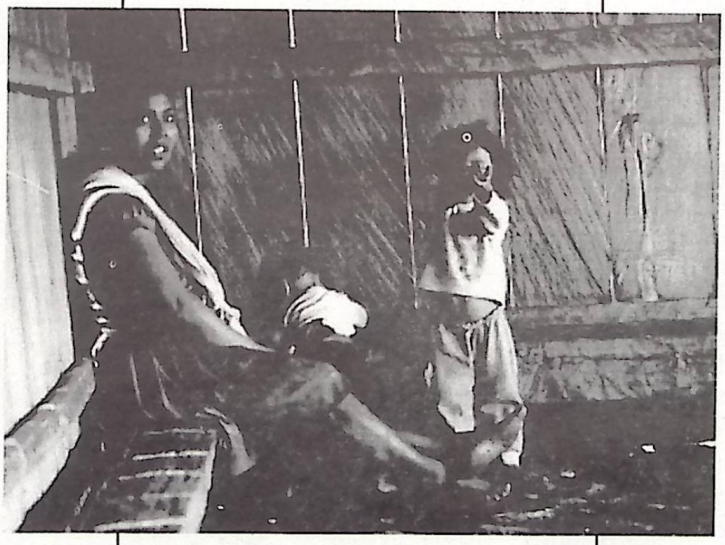
MUJERES - LA LUCHA DENTRO DE LA LUCHA

"Rebasó el agua mansa la vasija que la contenía y se hizo río bravo de movimiento...."

"Las mujeres son el sustento espiritual y material de este ejército, si podemos sobrevivir en grandes contingentes, es por ellas..." (Subcommandante Marcos).

Desde que hace algunos años, el EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) empezó a organizarse, las mujeres entendieron que ellas también podían y debían luchar con todo su pueblo contra la explotación, discriminación y abuso de poder del que son víctimas por el simple hecho de ser indígenas. Pero al mismo tiempo comprendieron que por el simple hecho de ser mujeres, tenían otro frente en el que luchar: tenían que acabar con la discriminación que sufren dentro de su propia sociedad; una sociedad tradicionalista y de un machismo exacerbado, en la que, se las considera seres inferiores sin derecho a la vida pública ni a la educación. Después de largos debates entre todos los grupos de las diferentes comunidades, las mujeres hablaron por medio de su portavoz, Ramona, miembro del Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena (CCRI), para exigir que sus derechos fueran reconocidos y así, el 8 de marzo de 1983 se aprobó la Ley de Mujeres del EZLN. Los diez puntos de esta ley son:



1. Las mujeres, sin importar su raza, credo, color o filiación política, tienen derecho a participar en la lucha revolucionaria en el lugar y grado que su voluntad y capacidad determinen.

2. Las mujeres tienen derecho a trabajar y percibir un salario justo.

3. Las mujeres tienen derecho a decidir el número de hijos que pueden tener y cuidar.

4. Las mujeres tienen derecho a participar en los asuntos de la comunidad y tener cargo si son elegidas libre y democráticamente.

5. Las mujeres y sus hijos tienen derecho a atención primaria en su salud y alimentación.

6. Las mujeres tienen derecho a la educación.

7. Las mujeres tienen derecho a elegir su pareja y a no ser obligadas por la fuerza a contraer el matrimonio.

8. Ninguna mujer podrá ser golpeada o maltratada físicamente ni por familiares ni por extraños. Los delitos de violación o intento de violación severamente.

9. Las mujeres podrán ocupar cargos de dirección en la organización y tener grados militares en las fuerzas armadas revolucionarias.

10. Las mujeres tendrán todos los derechos y obligaciones que señalan las leyes y reglamentos revolucionarios.

La aceptación de esta ley ha permitido a las mujeres integrarse con su pueblo en la lucha contra el opresor.

Algunas se decidieron por la lucha armada. Son las insurgentes, una generación de mujeres muy jóvenes que el pueblo ha entregado a la guerra. Se unieron al EZLN y forman el 35% de éste. La mayoría tiene grado. Son responsables, organizadas y dueñas de una gran capacidad para la lucha porque como ellas mismas explican: "No tenemos nada que perder puesto que antes nunca existimos". Nacieron en comunidades indígenas y campesinas de Chiapas pero nunca han llevado una vida normal, no viven en casas ni tienen hijos ni otro proyecto de futuro que acabar con la injusticia que las mata desde hace lustros. El Ejército Zapatista les ha aproporcionado algo: han aprendido leer y escribir, política, tácticas de combate y a manejar armas. Pero lo más importante es que son respetadas por sus compañeros y comparten con ellos los mismos derechos y obligaciones; esto supone un gran salto cultural con respeto a sus madres, motivo por el cual son estas últimas las que incitan a sus hijas a unirse al EZLN.

Las otras, las que no pudieron unirse al ejército porque tenían hijos a los que atender luchan desde sus comunidades, son miembros del CCRI y su labor es organizativa e ideológica. Se ocupan de organizar los grupos de mujeres para que poco a poco enseñen unas a otras lo que van aprendiendo: principalmente "el castilla" (para poder defenderse ante el opresor) y política (para que todas entienden mejor contra que y por que están luchando). También se ocupan de trabajos como provisión de alimentos, confección de ropa etc.

Pero la lucha es para todas la misma: conseguir que sus derechos como mujeres sean respetados por su propio pueblo y que se respete el derecho de este pueblo a vivir una vida digna en su propia tierra.

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Indigenous Peoples

Mexico is a complex society: we often hear or read or the *peoples* of Mexico, and this page can only give a very brief impression of the diversity.

When the Spanish invader Hernán Cortes arrived in 1519, Mesoamerica - the region stretching from present day Nicaragua to what is now the southern U.S. - was home to 25 million people. To talk of Colombus, Cortes or others 'discovering' the continent is ridiculous. Some 4000 years ago the Olmec people were founding a civilisation which, like the Mayan, Zapotec, Mixtec, Toltec and Aztec societies, became a highly sophisticated culture. The advances made in mathematics, astronomy and other sciences, particularly by the Mayans and Aztecs, and their art and architecture, are still recognised today.

The Spanish invasion brought incredible destruction to these people. War and disease killed vast numbers, and both the military colonists and the Catholic missionaries sought to smash their societies. Great change has taken place, but even now, 504 years after Colombus first landed on the continent, Mexico is still home to 56 different indigenous peoples, each speaking their own language.

The most significant groups are the Tarahumaras, Nahuas, Huicholes, Purépechas, Mixtecos, Zapotecas, Otomís, Totonacas and Mayas. They still form the major population group in some regions of the country, but as in other parts of the world, indigenous peoples in Mexico are treated as worth-less, second class citizens by 'pure European' Mexicans and mixed race *mestizos* (like Travellers in Ireland). High levels of migration to the cities - where they often end up as the cheapest of the cheap labour - and to the U.S. has been one consequence of the loss of traditional lands.

The attacks, spearheaded by recent governments, on the *ejido* system (common lands administered by the community), for example, is a big threat to indigenous culture. As Tom Barry writes in his *Mexico, a Country Guide* , "In many areas, *caciques* or rural bosses not only control land but also monopolise the marketing of nearly all regional production and the local food supply. In Chiapas, for example, the Tzeltales, Tzoltiles, Tojolabales, Chamulas and others have been pushed off their land and are now forced to provide cheap labor on large cotton and coffee plantations".

The 504 years of colonisation have also, however, been five hundred and four years of resistance. Indigenous peoples' organisations are now beginning to make a big impact, at least on the consciousness of Mexican society. Resistance to the destruction of the environment, defence of indigenous peoples' livliehoods and cultures, demands for development programmes and the protesting of human rights abuses are making the news. But, as the EZLN argued in their Declaration of War on the government, the *mestizo* establishment has not wanted to listen until it was forced to. Racism is a fact of life in Mexico (too): one that costs lives. But the struggle goes on, for the dead are only dead if they are forgotten.

"I break this egg and the woman is born and the man is born. And they will live and die together. But they will be born again. They will be born and they will die once more and be born another time. And they will never stop being born, because death is a lie."

Eduardo Galeano, 'Myths of the Makiritare Indians'

"No morirá la flor de la palabra. Podrá morir el rostro oculto de quien la nombra hoy, pero la palabra que vino desde el fondo de la historia y de la tierra ya no podría ser arrancada por la soberbia del poder."

(The flower of the word will not die. The hidden face of whoever names it today may die, but the word which came from the depths of history and of the land cannot now be torn out by the contempt of the power.)

Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena - Comandancia General del EZLN, México, 1996.

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Mexico: History of Struggle

The struggle of the masses in Mexico dates back to the early 16th century when Spanish forces invaded the Yucatan and Mexican coasts.

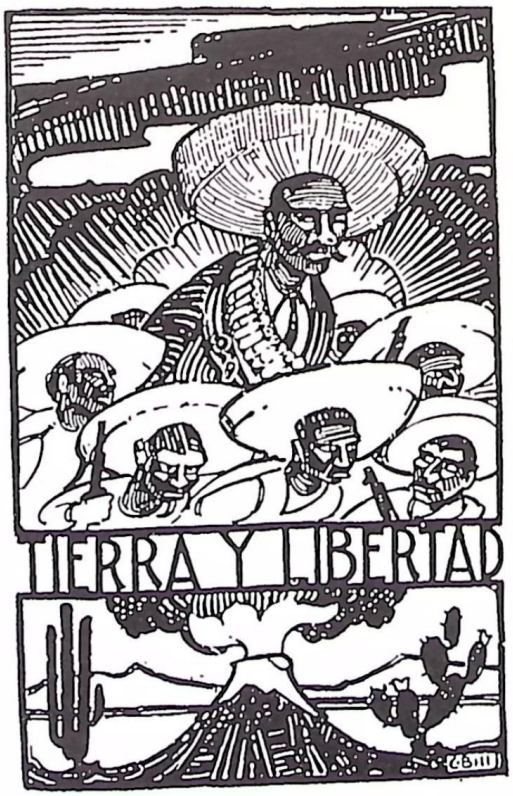
Henadez de Corboda and Herman Cortes were the Spanish officers in charge of the expedition to conquer the vast Aztec and Mayon civilisations. In 1521, after two years of vicious fighting, Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City) fell to Cortes, and by 1525 Francisco Montejo had conquered the Mayon people. By 1540 most of northern Mexico was under Spanish rule.

Years of oppression followed as the Spanish conquerors tried to pacify the indigenous population. For the next three hundred years Mexico was ruled as a Spanish colony. The native population revolted in 1541, but the uprising was crushed. The Spanish rulers proceeded to rob Mexico of all its natural resources, mainly silver, and created vast plantations for the export of wheat, sugar cane, etc. By the 17th century the economy of 'New Spain' collapsed. Disease and overwork cut the native population from 12 million in 1520 to one million by 1720, but it was not until the early 19th century that major threats to Spanish rule began.

The first revolt occurred in 1810. It was led by Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a parish priest who issued 'Grito de Delores', calling for an end to Spanish rule, redistribution of land, and empowerment of the masses. Costilla and his followers were captured and executed. A following uprising by Jose Maria Moreles y Pavon in 1814 was also crushed, and the disintegrating independence movement turned to guerilla warfare.

Vicente Guerrero led this new struggle and in 1821 he negotiated a treaty with the ruling Spanish elite to gain self determination for the colony. A congress was elected, and after a military rebellion in 1823 Mexico became a republic.

In 1845 the U.S. Congress voted to annex Texas and war with Mexico ensued. By 1848 North American superiority overwhelmed the Mexican Army, and Utah, Texas, Nevada, California, New Mexico, and most of Colorado came under American control.



In 1857 Benito Juarez issued a new constitution in an effort to abolish the remnants of colonialism. Land reforms did nothing however to improve the lives of the majority of the population who lived in poverty. To make matters worse, civil war broke out in 1858 between the liberals led by Juarez and the conservatives. Juarez was victorious and some of his later reforms helped to lessen the excessive power of the church and the army. His liberal successors were not as successful.

In 1876 Porfio Diaz seized power and his monopoly on political power over the next thirty years was a major cause of the revolution in 1910.

The 1910 revolt was led by Francisco i Madero, who advocated neither social reforms nor drastic change. With conservative support, another general, Victoriano Huerta, overthrew Madero. The peasants continued the revolt begun in 1910 and Pancho Villa and Emile Zapata became the two key figures in the struggle against Huerta. Huerta was defeated and control fell into the hands of Venustiano Carranza, a rich landowner who had supported Madero. Civil war broke out between his forces and those of Villa in the north and Zapata in the south. By 1920 the popular uprising had been crushed.

A new party, the PNR, then consolidated power, and depression in the 1930's caused a reversal of land reforms and an increase in the rich/poor divide. The PNR (now PRI) has ruled Mexico ever since with a peculiar one party system.

In 1968 a major student uprising was crushed and the PRI party became more indifferent towards the oppressed masses On 1 January 1994 the EZLN, an unheard-of revolutionary organisation, seized power in parts of Chiapas, southern Mexico, calling for the reforms Zapata had fought and died for. Forty thousand federal troops now surround the revolutionaries, and the Mexican government is again under extreme pressure to reform. The struggle of the indigenous and oppressed people of Mexico has never ceased and the EZLN have captured the imagination and won the support of many.

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